

Crisis Management:

Scenario 4

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I. Assessment of the Crisis and Affected Stakeholders

This scenario presents a high-stakes crisis that bridges community violence with school safety, exacerbated by significant staffing shortages. The primary objective is to secure the building, manage the flow of information, and maintain a safe emotional environment. A crisis of this magnitude affects numerous stakeholders:

1. **The Siblings of the Shooter:** They are highly vulnerable and require immediate emotional assessment and physical protection;
2. **The General Student Body:** Students are arriving with heightened anxiety, operating on rumors, and requiring reassurance before any academic learning can occur;
3. **Building Staff:** Teachers are forced to manage classroom anxiety while dealing with the stress of two missing colleagues;
4. **Parents and the Community:** The community is susceptible to the "telephone game," where rumors can quickly spiral into panic;
5. **District Administration:** Central office personnel must be kept informed to support the building and manage potential media inquiries; and
6. **Local Law Enforcement:** Police are currently investigating the neighborhood incident and must partner with the school to ensure spillover violence does not occur.

II. Phase 1: Immediate Safety & Triage (The First 30 Minutes)

With the SRO absent, immediate action is required to establish a secure perimeter and stabilize the building's internal environment.

Law Enforcement Coordination

The immediate first step is to contact the local police department, utilizing established network contacts or the non-emergency line. The goal is to ask law enforcement what intelligence they can legally share to help evaluate if there is a valid threat to school safety.

Intercepting the Siblings

Before they enter the general student population, the siblings of the alleged shooter must be discreetly brought to the office, counselor, or social worker. This is not a disciplinary action, but a triage measure to assess where they are emotionally. It is critical to determine if they are victims in need of support, or if there is potential for them to be active participants in a spillover conflict.

Solving the Sub Shortage

To address the two absent substitute teachers, the collective bargaining agreement must be consulted to determine options for uncovered vacancies. Non-classroom personnel, such as instructional coaches or reading interventionists, should be reassigned. If necessary, mild to moderate special educators could be utilized, or classes can be combined in a fair and predictable manner to ensure no classroom is left unsupervised.

III. Phase 2: Communication, Rumor Control, and Student Support

Once the physical perimeter is secure, the focus shifts to emotional well-being and managing the narrative.

Student Support (“Maslow Before Bloom”)

If students are buzzing about the event, the school must address their basic psychological needs before expecting them to engage with academic standards. Staff will be directed to have artful conversations with distressed students, emphasizing that it is

okay to talk about the event with trusted adults. However, staff must also redirect students from discussing it in the lunchroom, as that environment causes the rumor mill to spin out of control.

Staff and District Communication

The Superintendent's designee must be briefed immediately, as a superintendent is never truly off the clock, even when out of state. Staff will receive a brief, factual update. They will be directed to be highly visible in the hallways during transitions, monitor the spread of rumors, and send distressed students to counseling.

Community Messaging

Community communication must be handled delicately to avoid unintended consequences. The administration will monitor how fast the rumor is spreading. If messaging is necessary to correct misinformation, a notification will be sent out using reassuring language, confirming that there is no threat to the school and that administration is in contact with local law enforcement.

IV. Phase 3: The Personal Dilemma

A school administrator is never entirely off the clock. The personal half-day to take a parent to a medical appointment must be weighed against the credible threat level of the building. Alternative transportation for the parent will be sought. If the principal absolutely must leave, they will secure administrative backup in the form of another principal from the district to take over building command.

V. Evidence of Cooperating Administrator Involvement

Consultation with my Cooperating Administrator provided critical, real-world strategies that guarantee the success of this crisis plan. His insights ensure the plan works for the following four reasons:

1. Law Enforcement Intelligence: My cooperating administrator's strategy to immediately contact the police non-emergency line works because it removes administrative guesswork. It provides factual, real-time intelligence from the hierarchy to accurately gauge the credibility of the threat.
2. Strategic Emotional Triage: My cooperating administrator's application of "Maslow before Bloom" works because actively providing safe spaces for students to talk with trusted adults prevents rumors from spiraling in unmonitored areas like the cafeteria.
3. Calculated Community Messaging: My cooperating administrator's "don't put the poop back in the goose" analogy works because it forces a pause before utilizing mass communication tools. By evaluating whether a message will correct misinformation or simply spread hysteria, the school avoids causing unnecessary community panic.
4. District-Wide Networking: My cooperating administrator's reliance on district networking works because it provides a failsafe for the personal half-day dilemma. By calling on other district principals for administrative backup, the building is never left vulnerable or leaderless during a tense situation.